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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1543
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3595
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2988
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
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SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN: EMBASSY HOSTS IFTAR DINNER

REF: BISHKEK 43

¶1. (SBU) On September 17, Grand Mufti Murataaly Aji Jumanov presided over an Embassy-hosted Iftar dinner attended by leaders of the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The Mufti expressed his gratitude to the Embassy for organizing the event that brought leaders of different religious communities together to break the fast and share in the celebration of Ramadan. Jumanov expressed interest in expanding the relationship between the Embassy and the Muftiate and invited us to attend the Orozo Ait (Eid al-Fitr) celebration in Ala-Too Square with him on Sunday. Interestingly, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry did not hold its traditional Iftar dinner this year.

¶2. (SBU) The head of the State Agency for Religious Affairs, Kanybek Osmonaliyev, spoke of the preparations for Hajj pilgrims to depart for Mecca beginning on November 5. The Saudi government allotted 4,500 slots for Kyrgyz citizens to join the 2009 pilgrimage. Osmonaliyev commented that some Kyrgyz youths would be making the trip this year. When asked about the resurgence of religion among Kyrgyzstan's youth, Osmonaliyev described the trend as being the product of a post-Soviet country emerging from years of state-imposed atheism. He believed that the Kyrgyz people are still struggling to reacquaint themselves with their religious heritage.

¶3. (SBU) After most of the guests departed, Catholic Bishop Nikolaus Messmer, Baptist Pastor Alexander Shumilin, and lawyer to the Christian community, Asel Bayastanova, told Emboffs that religious freedom continues to decline after President Bakiyev's signature of the restrictive law on religious organizations in January (reftel). Asel spoke of the ongoing struggle for foreign missionaries to attain the proper visas and licenses necessary to work with religious groups.

¶4. (SBU) Pastor Shumilin spoke of small Christian churches in the regions experiencing visits by the tax police and other local authorities. He said that the local officials have started a campaign of harassment against several churches. He promised to provide further information and said he will

draft a letter of complaint to be delivered to Osmonaliyev.
We noticed that Osmonaliyev avoided any substantive
conversations with the leaders of the minority Christian
groups throughout the dinner.
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